



Press release

Protected areas in Central Africa: a new report proposes avenues to improve their effectiveness

Central Africa currently has more than 200 protected areas covering a total of 800 000 km², or twice the size of Cameroon. Across the 10 countries of the region, the number and size of protected areas have doubled in the last 20 years. According to the new report entitled “State of protected areas in Central Africa: 2020”, Central Africa is close to meeting the international targets for protected areas. However, these areas are often poorly run and their management could be improved. In the interests of sustainable development, the authors of the report insist on the importance of protecting this natural capital, which will, in return, contribute to the socio-economic development of the region.

On 29 June 2021, the Central Africa Forest Observatory (OFAC) presented an updated review of the state of protected areas in the 10 member countries of the Commission of Central African Forests (COMIFAC).

“The goal of this report is to help all Central African countries to better manage their protected areas, but especially to promote sub-regional cooperation on common and transboundary issues”, says Hervé Martial Maidou, Executive Secretary of COMIFAC. “It proposes a vision of partnerships between protected area managers, communities, governments and civil society, with the shared goal of improving conservation efforts and contributing to achieving global objectives on the protection of biological diversity”.

Prepared by a group of experts specialising in conservation in Central Africa, with the **financial support of the Organisation of African, Caribbean and Pacific States (OACPS) and the European Union (EU)**, through the BIOPAMA and RIOFAC projects, as well as GIZ, the “State of protected areas in Central Africa: 2020” report follows on from the first edition published in 2015, which has now become the flagship publication on protected areas in the region.

This 2020 edition, coordinated by three scientific editors from CIRAD and OFAC-COMIFAC, contains contributions from some 50 authors from Central Africa and elsewhere. It provides a harmonised picture of the network of protected areas across the whole region. The report clearly shows that the national and sub-regional networks have been greatly strengthened, but that they still face many challenges. Detailed analyses, aimed at informing policymakers and managers, thus explore several important issues: governance, ecotourism, human-elephant conflict, transhumance, mining and the oil industry. The report shows the importance of protected areas for the sustainable development of Central Africa: its goal is to contribute to a multi-sector dialogue and to improve the incorporation of these areas into country development strategies.

“The year 2020 marked a decisive moment in the conservation of nature, as the world took stock of progress towards the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020 and negotiated the new Global Biodiversity Framework”, says Trevor Sandwith, Director of the Global Protected Areas Programme at the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). “This report makes a significant



contribution to the analysis of the many factors that determine the success of protected areas in Central Africa, but also of the challenges that will need to be addressed in order to achieve the global objectives set. This publication will therefore help to target the types of action and investment needed to improve the governance and management of protected areas and to support their effectiveness as the basis of not only life on earth and under water, but also of the Sustainable Development Goals for our planet”.

The **protected areas of Central Africa** cover **15 % of the land area** and **5 % of the marine area of the region**, which shows significant progress towards achieving the Aichi Targets – set at 17 % for land areas and 10 % for marine areas – adopted by the member countries of the Convention on Biological Diversity in 2010. However, the management of these areas still needs to be improved. Indeed, several factors, including the lack of human and financial resources, the limited participation of local people, and the scarcity of data on the areas to be monitored as a priority, all require special attention in future action.

In nine chapters, the “State of protected areas in Central Africa: 2020” report examines the main challenges facing the region. The launch of the report on 29 June 2021 is the opportunity to take stock of two of these issues: the **governance of protected areas** and **relations with the extractive industries**.

Better integrating local populations into the management of protected areas in Central Africa

Increasing the role of communities in the management of protected areas is the main recommendation made by the authors of the chapter on governance. Systems that include local communities are the ones that yield the best results in terms of the conservation of natural resources and the well-being of local populations.

IUCN currently recognises four types of governance of protected areas:

- Public: management is entirely the responsibility of the government;
- Shared: management is shared between public and private entities (for example, through public-private partnerships);
- Private: governance is provided by private entities;
- Community: local communities manage the protected areas themselves.

In Central Africa, 85 % of protected areas currently have a public governance system. Shared governance accounts for around 14 % of management systems, and the remaining 1 % includes the few cases of entirely private or community governance. In the case of shared governance, management is typically organised with private non-profit organisations such as NGOs, through public-private partnerships and, more rarely, with communities.

According to Patrice Bigombe Logo, Director of the Centre for Research and Action for Sustainable Development (CERAD), these emerging management methods have many benefits: *“There are currently a number of contracts that delegate the management of protected areas via public-private partnerships. We see that this type of partnership rapidly improves the management of protected areas, thanks to regular financial and human support. Moreover, this system makes it easy to include local populations, through consultation, decision-making or job creation”.*

Other recommendations concern in particular:



- Legislation: the legal framework for the governance of protected areas dates back to the colonial period. The authors call for new adapted, operational and coherent legislation.
- Regional cooperation: given that many protected areas are transboundary, a reform of the regional institutional coordination of the network of protected areas in Central Africa appears necessary.
- Support for stakeholders: current projects providing technical, material, financial and human support are often restricted to a maximum of five years. The authors call for medium-term support, planned for a minimum of 10 years.

Reconciling biodiversity protection and development: improving relations with the extractive industries

“In Central Africa, around half of the network of protected areas is currently under threat from oil and gas permits”, says Georges Belmond Tchoumba, Regional Coordinator of the WWF Central Africa Forest Programme. “This percentage increases to 60 % if we include the mining industry. Permits have already been granted in 27 % of protected areas”.

The extractive industries are an economically powerful sector. The protected areas thus face an asymmetry of resources and investments, and are at a disadvantage during discussions on economic development policies.

“This ignores the importance of biodiversity for sustainable development”, says Charles Doumenge, a researcher at CIRAD and chief scientific editor of the report. “We know, for example, that maintaining good forest cover helps to improve soil fertility and to increase rainfall, which ensures protection for the agricultural sector and therefore food security for the region”.

Rather than placing conservation and development in opposition, the authors thus propose improving management of the impacts of the extractive industries: banning them from certain biodiversity-rich areas, and allowing them in other areas according to strict conditions guided by environmental impact studies.

“The goal of the 2020 report on protected areas in Central Africa is to show that biodiversity protection and socio-economic development are intrinsically linked”, says Florence Palla, Regional Coordinator of the RIOFAC project and scientific co-editor of the report. “In the context of sustainable development, the protected areas are an integral part of productive systems, provided local populations are involved in their management”.

Reference

Doumenge C., Palla F., Itsoua Madzous G-L. (Eds.), 2021. Aires protégées d’Afrique centrale – État 2020. OFAC-COMIFAC, Yaoundé, Cameroun & UICN, Gland, Suisse : 400 p.
Available in English in August 2021.

Download the report: <https://www.observatoire-comifac.net/publications/edap>



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About the institutional editors

The Central Africa Forest Observatory (OFAC) was created in 2007 as a specialised unit of the Central African Forests Commission (Commission des forêts d'Afrique centrale COMIFAC) to provide the up-to-date, relevant data on the region's forests and ecosystems that is needed for policy-making and to promote better governance and sustainable management of natural resources. OFAC is supported by the EU-funded RIOFAC project. <https://www.observatoire-comifac.net/ofac/observatory>

IUCN is a membership Union composed of both government and civil society organisations. It harnesses the experience, resources and reach of its more than 1,400 Member organisations and the input of more than 18,000 experts. IUCN is the global authority on the status of the natural world and the measures needed to safeguard it. www.iucn.org

About the financial partners

European Union : The Member States of the European Union have decided to link together their know-how, resources and destinies. Together, they have built a zone of stability, democracy and sustainable development whilst maintaining cultural diversity, tolerance and individual freedoms. The European Union is committed to sharing its achievements and its values with countries and peoples beyond its borders. <http://europa.eu/>

The Organisation of African, Caribbean and Pacific States (OACPS), formerly known as the ACP Group of States, is an organisation created by the original Georgetown Agreement in 1975, and subsequently revised in 2019. The OACPS' main goals centre around the sustainable development of its Members and their gradual integration into the global economy; coordination of OACPS activities in the framework of the implementation of the existing Partnership Agreement with the European Union; consolidation of unity and solidarity among Members of the OACPS; and the establishment and strengthening of peace, security and stability in free and democratic societies. <http://www.acp.int/>

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BIOPAMA: The Biodiversity and Protected Areas Management (BIOPAMA) programme aims to improve the long-term conservation and sustainable use of natural resources in African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries, in protected areas and surrounding communities. It is an initiative of the Organisation of African, Caribbean and Pacific States (OACPS) financed by the European Union's 11th European Development Fund (EDF), jointly implemented by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and the Joint Research Centre of the European Commission (JRC).

www.biopama.org



RIOFAC: The project Strengthening and Institutionalization of the Central African Forest Observatory (RIOFAC) is funded by the European Union, and supports OFAC, an entity within COMIFAC, in the production of updated and relevant information on the forests of Central Africa with the aim to inform policy-making for sustainable development. It is implemented by a consortium integrated by the Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR), the Center for International Cooperation in Agricultural Research for Development (CIRAD), the company FRM Engineering, and the Catholic University of Louvain. <https://www.cirad.fr/en/worldwide/cirad-worldwide/projets/riofac-project>

